

GOVERNOR SMITH'S
PROCLAMATION FOR A FAST,
REVIEWED AND SPIRITUALIZED.

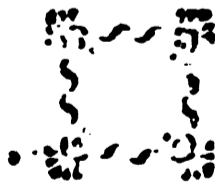


AN AFTERNOON'S
SERMON,

DELIVERED AT
PLYMOUTH IN VERMONT,
APRIL 13th, 1808,

BEING A DAY SET APART BY AUTHORITY,
AS A SEASON FOR HUMILIATION,
FASTING, AND PRAYER.

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Fast Day SERMON.

JOEL, ii. 16, 17.

Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, spare thy people, O Lord.

HAVING attended to the explanation of our text, we pass to improve our subject, pertinent to the solemnity of the present occasion. And since God hath put it into the hearts of our rulers, correspondent to his own directions, and the practice of his ancient people, to appoint this as a day of solemn fasting, prayer, and humiliation, and as the chief magistrate of this state has recommended and enjoined, certain very solemn and important moral duties, it will be very useful, in the improvement of our subject, to make some practical remarks on the proclamation sent to us by the governor of this state: and in pursuance of our subject, we shall follow the proclamation in its order: And to begin with the first proposition.

It is a truth made known by inspiration, and is agreeable to the dictates of reason, that frail, dependent beings, should feel and ex-

press a lively sense of their dependence, on Him who created and continually upholds them; and that moral accountable beings, should observe the laws and seek the favor of Him, who is their moral governor, and their final judge.

Let us seriously enquire, have we felt as if we were dependent beings? It is very important and necessary that we improve our subject, by a close examination and application: for it will be of no real use to us, to hear the most sublime and solemn truths, urged in the most pathetic manner, if they do not reach to and affect the heart.

When we view mankind at large, does not the conduct of many appear, just as we might reasonably expect it would, if they had long since demonstrated to themselves, that they were entirely independent, and accountable to no being but themselves; which they appear to make the great end of all their deliberations and conduct? Have we felt towards the great, eternal, self-sufficient Jehovah, as if we believed him to be independent? And have we felt and expressed a lively dependence on Him, the infinite fountain and source of all existence, life, amiableness and blessedness? Have we felt the great distance between an infinite God and us finite dust of the footstool; of which there is no comparison? Have we felt that there is not only a distance between God and us, in this respect, but likewise that

we are not only at an infinite distance from God in a natural, but likewise in a moral sense? as God is not only great and glorious in his natural perfections, but infinitely glorious in his moral excellencies; and we, not only atoms of an atom world, but infinitely vile and criminal; and so at an infinite natural and moral distance from an infinite God. I say, have we felt and realized this most solemn, awful, and important truth? If we have not, it is time that we immediately attended to these soul-interesting subjects.

We rejoice that our supreme executive appears to have such a serious, solemn, and deep felt sense of the great and sublime truths which they have recommended to their constituents, as what they believe to be so important. We rejoice that they believe that God is the great independent king; the king of kings: And that God will judge the judges too, as saith the poet. Have we all felt as if God was our final judge, and that he has a right to do, order and dispose of us, his creatures, according to his own pleasure, for his declarative glory?

2. It is also reasonable (*in quit proclamationem naster*) that those who are made capable of social acts, and relations, and who owe their improvement to the social state, should, as a society, make their acknowledgments of dependence and obligation, to Him

who hath endued them with these capacities, and privileged them with these distinctions.

Society is a great blessing, we are made capable of communicating to, and receiving from each other mutual happiness and reciprocal comforts; we cannot live, comfortably, alone; a person in a desert island, or in a wilderness, would be exposed to many inconveniencies, and be a lonesome creature.

Have we felt true gratitude to our common benefactor, for this as well as other blessings? But if we have not improved this, according to divine appointment, we invert the order of nature, and turn those things into means of wretchedness, by our misimprovement, which were designed by God for comforts, and would be such if rightly improved. How sad is it that mankind, the only intelligent beings in this world, and so capable of being the greatest comforts to each other, should conduct themselves in such a manner, many of them at least, as to be more dreaded than the voracious animals of the desert.

Have we realised these things? If we have, we shall endeavor to reduce nature to her original laws: And if we are duly sensible of, and truly grateful for this blessing, we shall improve it in a correspondent manner to such feelings of dependence, on our divine benefactor.

3d. I rejoice to hear our chief magistrate mention, the kind appointment of the Christ.
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tian Sabbath; which provides for the frequent assembling, in a social manner, to worship the most high God, and listen to the instructions of his sacred word.

There are also other seasons of the year, which seem to call upon us, in an especial manner, to unite, as a people, in corresponding acts of worship and homage.

I rejoice that our rulers have taken notice of the sacred Sabbath. If they feel towards the day as they have expressed in their proclamation, they will guard it by their authority, and provide for its observance; and if we are to meet on this holy day to hear the instructions of God's word, let us hear what it has to say concerning the Sabbath, "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable, and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, or finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rear ward: then shalt thou call and the Lord will answer, thou shalt cry and he will say

Here I am. And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, and a restorer of paths to dwell in."

Here we see at one view, not only the obligation which is sacredly binding upon us, to sanctify the Sabbath, which is sufficient to demand our cordial obedience, if there were nothing more ; but likewise the blessings promised to the obedient observers of the day, as a motive to a compliance with that which is so proper in its very nature.

Some have plead for a breach of the Sabbath, from lucrative principles ; but our quotations inform us, that the way to be happy, prosperous, and rich, is to observe the Sabbath.

Some will plead that they ought to go and stop cost on the Sabbath. What cost is this ? Is it money that you have promised to a minister of the Gospel, for his faithful labors ? no. Is it a debt which was contracted by reason of some vile intemperance, which on the whole was its cause ? then you have committed one sin in making the debt, and now plead for another to go and discharge it.

But we will suppose the best : are you a real christian ? And have you been prudent, and are wicked beings determined to afflict

you? Remember their time is short; submit the matter to God, do your duty faithfully, and fear not them that can only kill the body, but fear him who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell fire. I say unto you fear him.

What awfully trifling excuses will men make in this world, for the breach of the sacred Sabbath, which at the day of judgment will be blown away, like feathers before the driving storm: We never therefore should plead any excuse, that we would not make were we at the bar of God, and under trial for eternity. Therefore I presume, that if the chief magistrate of this state, feels that sacred regard for the Sabbath, which he has expressed in his proclamation, he will use his influence, and the power with which God has clothed him, to guard the sacred Sabbath, and prevent the awful violation of the Sabbath law: which is so offensive to a holy God, so detrimental to the temporal good and happiness of mankind, and so subversive to good order, and repugnant to the good laws, the peace and eternal felicity of the good people of this commonwealth.

4. It is recommended to us, that our minds be deeply impressed with this important truth, that it is righteousness which exalteth a nation, that prosperity and happiness are the reward bestowed on virtuous communities, but that sin is a reproach, and will usually be

followed with those calamities and miseries which involve the ruin of a people, and of consequence we are in the path-way of blessings, when we are in the path of duty.

Then we may hope for national blessings, while we experience national virtue, and in no other way can we expect them, because the want of righteousness and the existence of vice, as directly tend to destruction, as the withdrawing the rays of the sun causes cold and darkness, or the privation of health is sickness. Have we all, both rulers and ruled duly considered these things, and each one endeavored to mend one ?

As national reformations tend to national blessings, so individual reformations tend to individual blessings : so that although we may be so unhappy, as to live in the midst of a wicked and perverse people, yet if we are virtuous. God will take care of us, as he did of his servants of old. Habakkuk, for instance, had confidence in his God ; and after enumerating a number of calamities that would befall the people for their sins, he observes that his feet should be like hind's feet, and that he should flee away and be safe.

5. Let us therefore seriously enquire into our own hearts, whether we have mourned deeply for our sins, and those of our nation, and rest assured, that humiliation is the way, and the only way, to pardon, happiness and prosperity, through a glorious mediator : let

us therefore rest our souls on the value of his atonement, and trust the efficacy of his righteousness, for life and salvation.

6. Let us enquire whether we have prayed earnestly, agreeable to our proclamation, that God would give success to the means of education enjoyed among us; that he would bless our colleges, academies and schools, and cause them to be nurseries of sacred science, of good morals, and of real religion. If this has been our sincere and hearty desire, then we have used our endeavor to furnish our seats of education with instructors possessed of those desirable qualifications.

Many are careful that their teachers are men of science, and this is all the qualification necessary with them; others would wish to have them persons of good morals, and a noble and virtuous few would wish to have them persons of real religion: but this most necessary qualification is awfully neglected by many. Therefore if we pray that our schools may be such as our proclamation directs us to pray for, this will imply a desire for the accomplishment of our views, and a desire implies exertion. Therefore, if we desire and pray that our schools may be nurseries of piety, we shall exert ourselves to have them supplied with pious teachers.

7. Have we regarded the rising generation and prayed that God would bless their parent's blessing, and cause them to c

ward in life with habits of sobriety, order and virtue? As I have already observed, if we pray for the accomplishment of an event, it implies, necessarily, we desire that the effect may take place which we pray for: and a prayer, or sincere desire, for they are synonymous, implies exertion. For to say that a person desires and prays for something, and at the same time that he uses no exertions, or means, for the accomplishment of the end, is perfect nonsense, and an awful trifling with words.

Have we then regarded the rising generation? Does our legislature provide for them, and endeavor to restrain their excesses? Do they use their authority to prevent the ruin of our dear youth? that important part of the human family. How awful will it be for a parent, to stand like a weeping statue at the closing grave of a dear youth, with these cutting reflections on his mind: this poor young creature has done with life (as the pious Hervey observes) before it learnt its great errand into life, and before it learnt the worth of its soul: and perhaps learnt of me, its ungodly parent, to forget or neglect it. What cutting reflections these are none can realise, but those who know them by experience; I hope by the proclamation which we have received and read, that our legislature are really and and the only saviours of this important truth, and prosperity, & more than ever, are determined to

use their sacred authority, to assist parents and masters, to train up those under their care, for that God who placed these youth under their tuition. For as we have already observed, for the first magistrate of this state to enjoin on his constituents to pray for these things, and at the same time not to assist in the great and important work, is only mocking the people, and trifling with them, in such a manner as would cause our very souls to revolt, even at the most distant idea of such absurdity. And it is likewise the duty of a people to assist their magistrates, in the performance of their duty.

7. Is it not enough to make our blood freeze in our veins, to see people give their suffrages for civil officers, and then in the name of the great Jehovah, whose ministers of justice they are, swear them in a most solemn manner to be faithful, in the execution of the laws, of that God to whom they are accountable, and at the same time not assist, but rather discourage and hinder them from their duty.

8. Have we mourned for the spread of vice, and as our proclamation directs, have we prayed that God would check the progress of licentious principles and practices? How have we mourned? Has our mourning been like that of Joshua of old, when the children of Israel fled and fell before their enemies?

Joshua vii, 6. And Joshua rent his clothes,

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and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord, until the eventide, he and all the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads ; and Joshua said, alas, O Lord, God, wherefore hast thou brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us ? Would to God we had been content and had dwelt on the other side Jordan. O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turneth, turneth their back before their enemies ? for the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us around, and cut off our name from the earth, and what wilt thou do unto thy great name ?

Joshua, although a good man, seems to practice something like those spoken of in the 58th chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, where the almighty reproves them most sharply, in an interrogatory manner, by saying in the fifth verse, Is it such a fast that I have chosen ? that is, as if he had said, will you call this a suitable fast, and such an one as I shall approve of, which I am now to describe to you ? a day for a man to afflict his soul ? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and spread sack-cloth and ashes under him ? If this is all, it is vain hypocrisy : if this is all, if you do no more, hypocrites may appear to fast as well as you. The fast that I have chosen, is to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, that ye

break every yoke. So the Lord said to Joshua get thee up, wherefore liest thou upon thy face? as if the Lord had said, Joshua I have heard you, and now I will give you direction what you shall do: up, sanctify the people, for they have even taken the accursed thing, and have also stolen and dissembled: and therefore put away the accursed thing, from among you; for if you do not, I will not be with you any more, neither can you stand before your enemies.

Thus we see, that mourning for sins implies reformation, and reformation implies exertions in a people, to put away the accursed thing. Joshua might have prayed to this day, if he had lived so long, with his clothes rent, and sack-cloth and ashes under him, and yet if he had not put away the accursed thing, God would not have heard. And so it will be with us, my friends, we may cry and pray, but if we do not, as our text says, sanctify the congregation, by putting away the accursed thing, the Lord will not hear us.

Our legislature have directed us to deprecate against the horrors and calamities of war, and other sore judgments: but our prayers will be to him like awful howlings, if we do not put away the accursed thing, which is the cause of war, and all other calamities. But as has been observed under the former heads, so we observe here, that a desire for reformation implies exertion, and when our rulers

desire us to mourn for our national sins, and plead with God, that he would avert the awful impending judgments that threaten our land, on account of our national sins, we expect that they will, like good old Joshua, assist in a national reformation, by their authority, with which God has clothed them.

9. We are directed to pray for ministers of the gospel, that God would bless them, and inspire them with apostolic zeal and fervency, and render them instrumental, by their instruction and examples, in advancing the cause of genuine piety and solid virtue.

And, as we have uniformly observed, that to pray for, and desire the accomplishment of any event, as really implies exertion and endeavor, for the effecting the same; therefore we may presume upon the munificent aid of the legislative authority, and assistance, for the accomplishing so desirable an end.

If it is the duty of a people, to pray for so great a blessing as a good and faithful gospel ministry, then it is their duty to assist and encourage such in their arduous work; and if it is the duty, as has been enjoined by the chief magistrate of this state, then what solemmn mockery is it to request this of the people, without lending his kind assistance, for the settlement and support of such as they have directed us to pray for? Therefore if our legislators are sincere, we shall soon hear that they have passed an act, for encouraging the

settlement of gospel ministers, since this is one great and most important end of legislation.

Since Christ has made this world, and all things visible and invisible; and since all the valuable end that government can answer, is to promote the declarative glory and cause of Him, who made, who redeemed, and who governs this world.

If we are to pray that ministers of the Gospel may be zealous and fervent, it implies that we use our endeavors to procure such, and that we encourage them all in our power, by all possible means, and in all possible ways.

What is apostolic zeal and fervency, my friends? I have read somewhere that St. Paul's words were like thunder claps, and if we are directed to pray for such, then we are to love and encourage them, that they may imitate both St. Paul and Isaiah, and lift up their voices like a trumpet, and shew the people their sins, and God's spiritual Israel their transgressions.

10. We are requested to pray that God would bless all in authority, in this and the United States, and endow them with the spirit of their respective stations, and cause them to be a terror to evil doers, and a praise and encouragement to those who do well.

This demand upon the people implies so much, and is so fraught with important ideas, that we shall take very particular notice of it.

And to introduce this with our uniform observation, to pray that rulers may be such virtuous men, and achieve such noble actions, implies, that we give our suffrages to such and only such, who in our judgment are possessed of such characters and principles. This perhaps is an idea overlooked by many, and had it not been that the first magistrate of this State had put these words into my mouth, it would have been almost treason in me to use them; but I am exceedingly pleased that he has given us so favorable an opportunity, to express what I

have so long believed, that to pray for good rulers, is what God has commanded, and not to pray for them would be disobedience and rebellion, not only against the governor, but also against God himself.

St. Paul directs, Timothy, 1st Epistle, ii, 2, that prayer be made for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty : and this same apostle is very explicit, in shewing who this magistrate is, and what is his duty. Rom. xiii. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers ; for there is no power but of God : the powers that be are ordained of God. That is, God has all power in Heaven and earth, and therefore those who are set apart for magistrates, in this world, are ordained of God : a most solemn ordination indeed : they are his vicegerents, delegated by him, to act under him and for him. Verse 2. Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

How ought sinners to tremble in view of this solemn and awful subject, while they hear that those who resist the magistrate are fighting against God ? Hear this, ye profane, who say of the grand juror, belching forth an horrid oath to grace your observation, if he complains of me, for breach of Sabbath, I'll give him a flogging ! It is God that you are despising my friends ; he that resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God, for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil : wilt thou then not be a friend of the power ? Do that which is good and thou shalt have praise of the same.

From whence we see, that it is the wicked that despise God's ministers of justice ; for he is the minister of God to thee for good. Yes, dear friend, he is appointed for good to thee, to correct thy vices, for if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain : for he is the minister of God, a reveng-

er to execute wrath upon him that doth evil : therefore, poor, blind, ignorant sinner, whoever thou art, that despisest government, you are fighting against the great God of Heaven ! and how awful will it be, for a worm of the dust to be found in arms, against the omnipotent Jehovah ? but there are ways in which sinners may be found fighting against God, which perhaps they have not yet thought of, and that is to wish for and use their endeavors, to place men in office, who will be loose in the administration of justice ; especially grand jurors, whose business it is, among other things, to guard the Sabbath. The Bible points out to us the character of magistrates, and from that we are to take our directions, Exodus xviii, xxi. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people, able men, such as fear God : men of truth, hating covetousness. Here we have their qualifications, described by that God whose ministers they are ; and although this was but a man's advice and injunction, yet since God has honoured it with his approbation, and clothed it with his Divine authority, by giving it a place in Divine Revelation, we are bound to obey his command.

Moreover thou shalt, &c. here is the form of a positive command ; therefore those who give their suffrages for men, who do not answer the description, are disobedient. I feel myself warranted to talk thus, since I have the Bible and the authority of Jehovah on my side, and no one can fault these observations till the Bible is publicly put out of countenance.

We are commanded to provide out of all the people, able men : rulers ought to be men of abilities, but this is not all ; they must fear God too ; and this implies nothing short of true hearted piety. They must be men of truth, this implies that moral rectitude of soul, which resembles the great God of truth, whose ministers they are.

They must be haters of covetousness; this implies all that impartial disinterestedness, which will dispose them to have the glory of God, and the good of their constituents at heart: thus we see their character and duty, drawn to the life, in the oracles of Divine Revelation; and as it is our duty to pray for such rulers: it is equally so, to use our endeavors to place such in office.

If they are appointed by God, and this appointment is a divine ordinance, and if God has made us instrumental in placing such at the helm of government, as viceregents under God: what an infinitely important trust is there then committed to our charge! To vote wicked men into office, who do not regard the Sabbath and other divine institutions, and then pray that they may be such as the word of God requires, is as perfect nonsense, and as ridiculous, as it would be to vote open profane sinners into a church, and then pray that they may adorn their christian profession, by a life of shining piety. But you will say perhaps, that we may be deceived, both with respect to church members, and our rulers too.— True we may, but this by no means argues, but what we ought to have affirmative confidence, such as is satisfactory to us, so that in a judgment of charity, they are real christians, and consequently true friends to God.

Thus my friends, we see what is implied in the requirement in our proclamation from the Governor, and if the character and feeling of the chief magistrate of this state, corresponds with what he has sent to us, he is a true christian, and a real and pious friend to God; and of consequence as he is the highest minister of God in this state, we shall have the happiness of his authority and most potent aid, in effecting what he has requested us to supplicate so fervently for, on this day of solemn fasting and prayer.

And my dear fellow sinners, look at your conduct for a moment—what are you doing when you are tampering and trifling with a sacred and divine institution,

by placing men in office, whom you know, (by their fruits ye shall know them,) that they are not men of piety; and how does your conduct talk to you, (when you view it seriously) to place men in office, by your suffrages, and swear them in the most solemn manner, in the name of the great Jehovah, whose ministers they are, and whose laws they are to execute, and after you have done all this, by which you have commanded them yourselves, in the name and by the authority of the great God, to be faithful, then turn right about, and say if they dare complain of certain crimes, (if you do not understand me my friends, it is for breach of Sabbath) they will make disturbance in neighborhoods, it will not do, we are no used to such things.

What awful! what solemn mockery this! what awful trifling with sacred things! for these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Give this a serious and an attentive hearing, and I presume you must loath, detest, and abhor your own conduct—and the importance of endeavoring to place good men in office, and of doing all in your power to assist and encourage them in the performance of their duty, must correspondently be felt and realised by you: but perhaps you will say, this respects the higher order of officers, and not the lower class: but the Bible does not say this, it makes no distinction as to qualifications between rulers of 1000's or 10's, and therefore it is important that the lowest as well as the highest magistrates be men of piety and true virtue.

II. To conclude, let us view our subject and ask ourselves what our feelings are, with respect to the great and important truths brought into view in this discourse. No doubt we fear the horrors of war, intestine broils, and calamitous sicknesses; but do we fear sin, which is the sole cause of these sore judgments?

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I have not the most distant expectation, or even one desire, that God would avert the horrors of these impending judgments, in any other way, only by a reformation among the people: for should he do it, it would not be a blessing, but a great curse to us. To desire that a calamity may be removed, is to desire that the cause may be first removed: to desire that the cause of calamity may be removed, which is sin, implies that we use our endeavours to effect this desirable end. Whom the father loveth he chasteneth, as Mr. Flavel says, he hath precious mercies for his children, a blessing which he withholdeth from the wicked, he has a chastising rod for them, he holds out the rod of correction, in one hand and his bounties in the other: how much better therefore to be called up to repentance and other duties, in this world, than to be left like the Sodomites, an idolaters & others, to go on to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Therefore how can I pray sincerely for the prosperity of our country and dear people, in any other way, only that God, in his infinite goodness, would use his own ways, to bring us to repentance and reformation?

If God should avert the impending judgments that threaten us, and we remain impenitent, it would only serve to harden, instead of softening of us, and therefore would be a curse, instead of a blessing.

If we were a holy and virtuous people, all the combined powers of earth and hell could not harm us.

Let us then examine our situation—Are we in general a virtuous people? Have we good rulers at the helm of government? If these things are not so, we have reason to fear; for Ps. v. xxix, ii. When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice; but when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn. When the wicked rise, they hide themselves, but when they perish the righteous rejoice. Have we continued how provoking it is to

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And to give the government of this world to his enemies? This world was made by Christ, it was redeemed by him, it is upheld by him, for his own glory & pleasure, and he has the sole government of this and all worlds; and all the valuable ends that this world can answer is, to subserve the glorious cause of the Redeemer, and of redemption.

And can we expect happiness and prosperity, while the order and course of nature is so inverted, and this world, made, redeemed, and upheld by Christ, is made such an awful prostitute, and used in a manner, and for purposes so repugnant to the design of the great and righteous King and Owner.

And let us examine our feelings and conduct in these respects, and rejoice that our governor has requested us to pray, that rulers may be men of piety, terrors to evildoers, and a praise to such as do well; as this as clearly intimates, that we should give our suffrages to such and only such, as though he had expected us ever so explicitly: and be assured, that when we become a holy, then, and not till then, shall we be a happy people; and to pray for peace and prosperity, in any other way, would be like praying for health without being healed of sickness; or for ease and comfort, without the cause of pain being removed; or like making a fire, on a cold dark winter's night, to supply the want of the light and heat of the summer's sun. for the growth of vegetation.

Realize these solemn truths, and may the Lord spare his people.

AMEN.